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Celebrating arts and culture in the Haliburton Highlands

JANUARY 15, 2026

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Staying cozy
How one designer incorporates highlands charm into her style on page 4

Celebrating winter
Embracing the season on page 5

Let's have a toast!
Minden's newest restaurant feels like coming home on page 11

Winterdance dogs are ready to roll with the cool temperatures the county has been seeing this winter. Tours were packed over the holidays, and continue to be busy into the new year. /FILE

CECILIA: *Joining*

I SOON GET to write my first two-page monthly *editorial!* No composition has ever been called this. My teachers always corrected my stories, but these won't be marked. I'll still proofread it, and use my best handwriting for final copy. We have only one evening for editing. My parents will help since I like perfect spelling. But I like telling my opinions even better!

I'm Cecilia. Tomorrow, I turn 11. I'm in Grade 6. I'm brand new to this school and to this country. I like Miss Fields and I want to work hard. She hopes we'll ask questions during lessons. Anything, anytime, as long as we ask. My old teacher did this too. I really miss her and most of my classmates. We did science experiments, and she organized a student steelpan band. We even competed!

DEB REED
Wind in the Attic

This morning, a boy asked about *humidity*. Miss Fields paused the video to explain. We'd been talking about tropical climates, and somebody didn't understand. I understood because I come from Trinidad, and it gets pretty humid there, especially around September. *Humidity* means how much invisible water is in the air. Vapour is water in gas form. It can make warm days feel even warmer. So Miss Fields reviewed the water cycle and states of matter, and promised we'd do weather experiments next week!

My old classroom had air-conditioning. This one has wide-open windows with screens, plus fans if we need them. Today feels chilly. I can hear birds. Blue jays, I think. Chickadees, too. I'm getting better at naming them. I've been an Ontario student for three weeks now. My parents, sister and I moved up here in August. We spent July with Granny in Toronto. Then my father started his post at the new town clinic. Tomorrow (my birthday!), Mummy has *two* job interviews. She's bought plain shoes, but a posh jacket. Purple is her luckiest colour.

My sister and I take the school bus together. She's in Grade 3. I keep a close eye on her. I think I'm getting a cellphone for my present so we can check in with our parents. My sister isn't sure she likes this school, but I think she will. I told her that if she gives it time, she'll definitely make some nice Canadian friends. She misses her best pal.

I think I've made a friend. Last week, a girl called Eloise (Elo for short) asked me to play tetherball at recess. She said she saw me standing by myself on the pavement, so she invited me to join her lineup. I checked first to see if my sister was ok, and she seemed to be. A bunch of girls had crowded around her, and she was smiling.

Elo waits with us for the bus ride home. The driver sings out our names one-by-one as we all step inside. He asked my little sister her backpack Beanie's name, and now he sings that too. I feel like she's fitting in just fine.

CountyLife

The following inserts are being distributed with County Life this week:

Foodland *

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All inserts are to selected distribution areas.

For information on how your flyer can be inserted each week in County Life please contact Melissa Armstrong at **613-332-2002** or **melissa@haliburtonpress.com**

We are all on a path

I AM no mountain climber, but I have been on hikes and trails that seemed impassable at first. As you walk up to a hill it can seem so steep and formidable. However, many times as you get closer and just start gradually climbing it almost seems to level out more. A path becomes clearer in the climbing, just one step at a time in the next spot that makes sense and is within reach.

When we gaze at hills and hiking trails a well laid out path is often not in view, but as we start the climb it almost unrolls before us like a carpet, and the well-worn parts where others have already walked come into view. I often think about how the adults of my childhood seemed to have it all together, and now that I am an adult I am realizing they were just figuring it out and searching for their path, as I am now.

TERESA JORDAN
Community Living Contemplations

In times of great challenge there is really only the next step that we can take, only the next clear part of the path that we can embark on, and all we can really control is ourselves. I can control how I am showing up, how I am walking, my thoughts and reactions and my next step. I am guided by the landscape, the paths of others, the destination and the environment.

We are all going somewhere, sometimes exciting, sometimes challenging, in joy and in sadness. We are on a path, figuring out the steps that are right for each of us. When we look too far ahead or from too far away we cannot see any path or guidance. I guess, my main thought is that most of the time, you just need to start somewhere, look for the next logical, right step and keep on going. In staying true to ourselves, working to find the next step and taking charge for how we affect all that is around us we can overcome mountains, one step at a time.

Tusk, tusk…

Winter brings snow, sleet, ice, and – most importantly – unrealistic expectations. But honestly, is having a marshmallow in your hot chocolate too much to ask? Also, there is a stereotype that suggests that we outdoorsy types are more at home in our wintry environments than others.

Sure, we know how to pee in a snowbank better than most, which is to says that we can sign our names in cursive writing rather than merely printing it like some grade schooler. (By the way, no one gives outdoors women enough credit for their ability to do this.)

STEVE GALEA
Beyond 35

Aside from this, however, we are no different than anyone else when it comes to winter. Except maybe when they are on a frozen lake ...

I've written about this before. But the *Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy* has nothing on the average ice angler who is running to an ice fishing rod or a willow gad that is about to be pulled through a hole in the ice. In fact, many dance choreographers have been known to give standing ovations and openly weep at the sight.

While I am a bit older and less spry than I was in my early years, I still have a reputation for my ability regarding this artform. Last year, in the act of running to an ice fishing rod that was about to be stolen by a fish, I did several front flips, a back flip, two slides, a triple Lutz, a moonwalk, a pirouette, and a modified version of the Jitterbug. I could have got more moves in had the rod been further than three feet away.

To the casual observer that performance might have looked, dare I say it, random. But those who appreciate the artform (other ice anglers) recognize that this was not a one off – and not just because that was the second time I did it that morning.

They appreciate that a skill such as this takes years to develop. Sure, according to my childhood hockey coaches, I had a natural ability for this sort of thing. But, make no mistake, it takes at least ten ice fishing seasons to develop my level of artistry.

Of course, that is not the only ice-related winter activity we excel at. We are also the leading experts on the art of creating nasal icicles. And, again, not to brag, but I am considered a pioneer in the field. In fact, when you say the word "walrus" to most outdoorsmen and women, the odds are good that they will initially envision me. I will concede that almost anyone can grow a passable set of nasal icicles. But it takes a true determination and lack of self awareness to grow snot tusks that extend past your knees.

Let me just point out, these tusks are not just for show. No sir, they are also evolutionary tools.

You see, when two ice anglers arrive at the same location to fish, prolonged posturing and tusk displays immediately ensue. In one of the natural world's most beautiful and awe-inspiring displays, they will circle each other, grunt, and move their heads to show off their nasal icicles. Typically, the ice angler with the smaller tusks retreats.

After that happens, both anglers immediately remove their tusks, and then everyone breathes a little easier.

New carbon monoxide detector laws in effect

THOMAS SMITH
County Life Staff

Changes to the Ontario Fire Code are here.

On New Year's Day, new carbon monoxide regulations were put in effect across Ontario. Carbon monoxide detectors will need to be installed on every storey of a dwelling unit, and building owners and landlords are responsible in ensuring that carbon monoxide detectors are installed and maintained, while tenants and residents are responsible for reporting any issues.

As long as the carbon monoxide detectors meet safety standards, they can be hardwired, plugged in, or battery operated.

Previously, carbon monoxide detectors were only required near sleeping areas. Now even basements and main floors without bedrooms will require a carbon monoxide detector.

Carbon monoxide is a silent, odourless, undetectable killer.

With no smell or colour, carbon monoxide cannot be detected without a special instrument when at deadly levels.

During winter, the risk of suffocation from carbon monoxide is at its highest.

"All fuel burning appliances produce carbon monoxide, and if not properly used and vented, can fill the home with carbon monoxide," said Minden Hills Fire Chief Don Kruger.

Having a carbon monoxide detector on each floor allows a better chance for early detection. While carbon monoxide is produced from all fuel burning appliances, Kruger says that there have been no fatalities from carbon monoxide poisoning since becoming fire chief.

"I think the changes are a good idea," said Kruger. "The new rules are just bringing the requirements for carbon monoxide alarms to the same standards as smoke alarms."

Breathing in carbon monoxide gas limits your body's ability to carry oxygen in your blood. Symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning often include nausea, dizziness, and confusion.

Some tips towards carbon monoxide safety include:

- Testing your carbon monoxide detectors monthly. Most carbon monoxide detectors have a "Test" button that can be pressed
- Ensure battery back-ups are replenished regularly
- Replace detectors at the end of their service life
- Get all fuel burning appliances, such as chimneys and furnaces, inspected by a professional regularly
- Keep exhaust vents, chimneys, and intakes clear of snow, ice, and other debris
- Never use barbecues, fuel-burning heaters, or generators inside your garage
- Never idle a gas powered vehicle inside your garage, even when the door is closed

If your carbon monoxide detector alarms, seek help immediately or call 911. A chirping sound may indicate that the carbon monoxide detector needs its batteries replaced.

"As always, have working smoke and CO alarms in your home and have an escape plan that you practice," said Kruger.

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A glimpse inside some designs by Hilary Ramsay, who pulls from her upbringing in Haliburton to fuel her sense of style. /submitted

Calm in the chaos

How one designer aims to create a space that feels safe

EMILY STONEHOUSE
County Life Editor

Designer Hilary Ramsay has dedicated her career to creating spaces that feel safe, secure, and welcoming. /submitted

As we nestle down into our season of hibernation; long nights, cold days, the value in curating a space that feels like home is of the utmost importance.

Hilary Ramsay knows that all too well.

Ramsay was born and raised in Haliburton. It's always been home, and it's something she weaves and winds into her day-to-day career as the lead designer and founder for Hilary Ramsay Interiors. "You spend the majority of your life in your home and your surroundings have such an impact on how you live, think and feel," she shared. "When your home is thoughtfully designed, it creates a sense of calm and clarity and allows daily life to feel intentional rather than chaotic."

While Ramsay has built a world, a family, a career in the Haliburton Highlands, the path she took to return home had plenty of twists and turns.

She originally had planned to attend post-secondary school for architecture, but quickly changed gears to focus on interior design, and started attending OCAD University in Toronto. While in university, Ramsay worked at *House & Home Magazine*, where she started as an intern but quickly worked her way up to editorial assistant.

It was during this stage in her early career that she worked on design stories, photoshoots, and a number of 'Look for Less' articles, where she was tasked with finding similar products at different price points that would have the same impact. "This was a big deal for me at the time as it was my first taste at getting my personal design aesthetic out for others to see," she said, "and to a rather large audience."

Shortly after graduating university, her path found another twist. Ramsay met her now-husband, Ryan, who at the time, had a professional hockey career in Europe. "This took me to Germany and Italy," said Ramsay, "where I was fortunate enough to be exposed to centuries-old architecture and timeless details that I often reference in my work today."

Between hockey seasons, Ramsay was still fully-immersed in the design world. She had secured a job as the assistant set designer for the *Marilyn Denis Show*, and between the ongoing travel combined with keeping tabs on the ever-changing world of interior design, Ramsay began to build her portfolio for a career ahead. "It was these events and experiences that led me to my career and where I am today," she said.

Ramsay has since returned to her roots in the Haliburton Highlands, where she has a family and a home she has tastefully curated. And this is something that she strives for when working with clients. "My spaces will never feel like a furniture showroom - they are layered with antiques and vintage finds, old and new," she said. "Living in Haliburton has definitely shaped my style. I pull a lot from nature and my surroundings, not only with colours but also textures and even the feeling that being in nature gives you. I want my spaces to feel comfortable, inviting, inspiring and collected."

While Ramsay pulls from vintage finds and pieces of the past, she finds that she primarily works on new builds and cottages, to pull that old-world charm and rustic nature into a modern space. "My favourite part of the job is getting to work with clients who put their full trust in me," she said, "and allow me to fully execute their space that they will enjoy for years to come."

When asked about the direction of design looking ahead, Ramsay shared that there are some trends that she is getting excited about. "Things are definitely trending away from the 'too perfect' or 'Instagram-worthy' looks and I love that," she said. "Spaces should be lived in, feel authentic and personal. This comes with the use of more patterns and traditional influences as well as nature-inspired palettes."

Ramsay also noted that new builds seem to be trending away from the open-concept living space, which has been popular for the past two decades. "This isn't to say that open-concept is dead or that you should be erecting the walls that you once took down or eliminated from your floor plans," she noted, "but there is more thought being put into how to better define spaces."

One of Ramsay's goals for 2026 is to be a part of a build that really pushes for those boundaries, reflecting on the charm and character found in traditionally defined homes around dining rooms, kitchens, and living rooms.

Ramsay can be found via her website, www.hilaryramsayinteriors.com or through social media channels. "It's more than just having a beautiful space," she said. "If you surround yourself with pieces that you love or that have some sort of meaning, it will turn your space into a place that restores you and with the chaos of life today, I think that is so important."

Writing on the Senior Side

What's your winter?

GAIL STELTER

County Life Contributor

In her childhood story, she sees herself jumping on the end of the toboggan and sliding down the hill at High Park. She is laughing and loving winter. Later, she is walking, skates slung over her shoulder, to the outdoor rink. She is still young at heart and loves to build snow forts and create structures that become castles, horses, or caves. She relishes winter, well, most of winter. The blizzard-biting snow on the long walk to school could be omitted.

In her young mother story, she bundles them up and goes out to play. She pulls the toboggan, and they build a snowman and make perfect snow angels. Later, when the day is done and he is home from work, she bundles them up again so they can play in the snow mounds while he shovels the driveway and revs up the snow blower. The next morning, she says, "Dress warm, it's bitter cold out today. Don't forget your hats and mitts, and you need a scarf." Getting kids ready for school is a full-time winter pastime. They listen, and she is content and satisfied. This lasts until they are teens, and in some cases, preteens. Then coats are undone, boots may or may not be worn, and a hat is not needed. She says it anyway, every winter morning. "Dress warm, it's bitter cold out." It is a sign of her caring, and besides, didn't her mother say the same thing on winter mornings? It is a morning blessing bestowed on those we love. She applies this wisdom again when they are teenagers and driving the family car. The words change to "Drive carefully, the roads may be slippery." She laughs as she remembers the day she said it to her son, and he stopped in his tracks, paused, pondered and said, "No, not today mom. Today I will drive with reckless abandon." He laughs.

Memories of winter throughout our lives bring meaning to the senior side winter outside my window as I consider yet another bitter cold day. I am enraptured by the winter wonderland of song and story. Outside my window, the hillside and tall trees are majestic, dressed in flowing, layered white garments. Wind shakes the snow free from branches, and gusts of blizzard bits create snowbanks. Outside my window, snowmobiles buzz. Perhaps they are on their way to pristine trails or heading to town to meet friends. Outside my window, young people dressed in winter gear are crunching snow underfoot as they march along the roadway. To my right, I see a young

deer, its head buried in the snowbank. How did he know that the frozen pumpkin was underneath? I watch him dig. He does not care that I am watching. The frozen pumpkin is dinner. He makes no notice of the cars and trucks gingerly traversing the snow-covered road, which is only slightly improved by the midnight plough. The drivers are winter smart, content to follow in the wheel tracks of the cars in front. They know another snowplough will ease their return journey. I wonder about the drivers and their passengers. Are they going to work on this bitter morning? Have they bundled up, warmed up and cleared the snow off their cars to drive to an appointment or to shop? Did someone bid them farewell and say, "Be careful out there"? I am secretly glad it's them and not me. I don't like the cold, and today it is -16 Celsius. I make my coffee and sit by the fire and enjoy looking out my window. Later, I will watch Peter shovel snow. I tell him we should hire someone, but he says that it's good exercise and it brings back lovely memories. I will say, "Be careful and take a rest."

What's your winter? Are you hiking or snow shoeing or cross county skiing? I hope so, but I know the reality is that while many seniors enjoy winter pursuits, there are also many for whom winter is consumed with worries: cold, falling and isolation. We can do our best to keep warm. We can take precautions to avoid falls, but we know how quickly they can happen. While I am blessed not to be isolated, alone in the doldrums of bitter cold, I worry for those seniors who are. Feelings of isolation are heightened in winter. Shorter days, cold weather, limited outdoor activities, poor mobility due to arthritis or other health issues, and lack of access to transportation can all contribute to winter isolation. What can we do to lessen winter isolation?

I never thought I would say this, as I hate to see anyone, especially children and teens, devoted to Facebook, YouTube or other similar pastimes on the internet. Life is for living authentically, not as a spectator on a device. Nevertheless, for seniors who feel isolated, a computer or cell phone can bring a short daily click or scroll that can diminish those feelings, and when friends respond to our posts, we feel that all-important social connection.

Another vote for "technological company" goes to our very own local radio stations. We were the generation of transistor radios and 1050 CHUM. Turn your radio on, sing along, listen to local news and interesting interviews. When you sing, you feel good. When you dance, even better.

In addition, perhaps proactive steps like maintaining social connections through senior groups and community programs will work for you. Finally, have real visits with real people. Are you in a book club or writing group, or do you join friends for live music at a pub or local event?

Do you volunteer at a non-profit group?

Sometimes you have to be the one to put it out there. Invite a friend for coffee, plan an outing or ask a friend to go with you to an event. As I say to my grandchildren, and probably said to my children before them, if you think the girl or boy you'd like to meet or know better is gong to come knocking at your door, if you think the job or career you want will magically appear; if you think you will get all that life has to offer because you are a good person and deserve it, you have missed the point. You are an active participant in your life, and you must do your best to make the life you want happen. If you are a senior who feels isolated in winter, what will be your active participation? What will you do to change isolation to engagement? Do it now. If you don't, there is a real danger that isolation will morph into depression. You can stop that from happening.

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Emily Stonehouse Managing Editor
Steve Galea, Contributor
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Classifieds, Inside sales
Karen London, Production Co-ordinator
Stacey Potalivo, Production

146 Highland St., Box 360, Haliburton, Ontario K0M 1S0
Phone: 705 457-1037

Website: www.haliburtonecho.ca
Box 97, Minden K0M 2K0
Phone: 705 286-1288
Website: www.mindentimes.ca

Send your letters to the editor to emily@haliburtonpress.com. Letters must be signed and include a phone number.

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Books

FOR SOMEONE who spends the entirety of her days reading words, you would think that diving into books at the end of the day may not be desirable.

And you are right. For the most part.

I grew up loving books. Always captivated by the worlds they created, the characters they built, the stories they transported you to.

EMILY STONEHOUSE
County Life Editor

And my love for books continued, even as I grew. I have a vivid memory of coming home from university one summer; an angsty student in my late-teens at the time, and becoming a frequent flyer at the local library. While many tell you not to judge a book by its cover, I solely committed to that process when selecting my next title.

And as a result, I read countless books that I would not normally have picked up. I had a rule about not reading the back description, not reading the reviews, not reading the author's bio, until I had finished the book.

I was solely selecting books based on whether the cover grabbed me.

There are still books from that season that I think about regularly. My only regret is that I did not write them all down; their storylines and characters and themes swimming like lost goldfish in my brain; the major bits and pieces sticking out, but their titles evading concrete remembrance.

I loved reading so much that I made a career out of it. And what an honour that is. I spend every day of the week reading stories, reading news, reading photo cutlines.

But somewhere along the lines, the words began to blur. I stopped reading for the stories, and started scoping for comma splices, for incorrect abbreviations, for misspelled names.

And when I sought the solace of a personal book at the end of the day, the stories once again began to drift over my head; my eagle editor's eye seeking a blunder.

It has taken conscious thought and time to take off the editor's hat and find comfort in the love of reading once again. At the end of 2025, I noted that I had read 25 full books. And while comparing that number to others that folks are sharing online, it may seem menial, but for someone who dedicates their world to words, that feels like an accomplishment.

Because those 25 books represent a level of dedication to removing myself from the black and white, right and wrong perspective, and fully immersing myself into a world created by a fellow lover of words.

While a good book must go through many layers of editorship to be presented to the public, a really good book needs to allow you to forget the behind-the-scenes process, and dive right into the world created.

I will give my book club credit for many of the titles devoured over the past year. While I have grown past the game I played with myself around judging books by their covers, I have dove into many others that were presented based on the individual interests and flavours from varying women. We all take a turn selecting a book each month, and while some grasped me closer than others, I appreciated each exploration.

By nature, we are curious animals. And while the world spins and swirls around us; our unsteady footing not entirely sure of our next step, at least there are books. Books that are captivating, books that are beautiful. There are books that are passed down through the generations, and books that are banned (I highly recommend reading every and any book that is banned).

So even if you are someone like me, who feels they cannot cram one more word into their busy brains, I will still forever suggest books.

The worlds they create, the characters they build, and the stories they transport you to.

The first page is only the beginning.

Top 10 reasons to break your New Year's resolutions

HERE WE are in the first part of January, which is the traditional time to give up on our New Year's resolutions. Right now, a lot of you might be deluding yourself into thinking that you might actually keep your resolutions. But that's only because you do not have the imagination to express good reasons to quit. So here are my top 10. You're welcome.

STEVE GALEA
Humour Columnist

1. I don't care what my nutritionist said, no one could survive with that caloric intake.
2. Recent international events have made me reconsider wanting to live forever.
3. The chocolate industry needs me.
4. Activity is highly over-rated.
5. Most of my resolutions were based on the world being a much more stable place.
6. History suggests that I am deluding myself by continuing with this charade.
7. I truly believe me giving up addresses my resolution to bring happiness and comfort to others.
8. If I do it now, I will save a lot of unnecessary heartbreak.
9. No one told me about the kale.
10. I was doing well, and then decided to raise a glass to my success…

Sideways

Wind flinging the wings of seagulls, sideways, flapping through Air without going anywhere,
lead-bellied clouds swelling with seeds of storm, as I stare up at Sky, the pair of gulls dueling with Wind over the frozen Lake,
cloistered beneath its ceiling of ice, its roof of Snow, knives of Wind slicing through me as I clomp along the path,
slipping on a patch of ice concealed by a skin of Snow, wobbling like the gulls' wings up in Sky,
stretching out my arms, trying not to fall, Wind bashing into me as I turn my back on it for a moment,
my eyes blinking away tears from the cold, that bites my ears, sears my bones,
wondering where the gulls are meaning to fly this morning on this second day of the newborn year,
boulders of Snow barricading the slope of the hill from the side of the road, too high to clamber over,
so I remain on the path, taking the longer way back, the seagulls squawking above me, for company,
watching their wings flapping against the Wind, its current carrying them wherever it chooses,
admiring their perseverance in their flight, not grounding their wings to rest on a hillock of Snow for a moment,
before they flap back up into Air again, to endure the wrath of Wind that hurls me along the path,
feeling flimsy as the crumpled brown leaf that somersaults across the tundra of park,
the rest of its con-freres, long buried in Snow, the leaf must have just recently loosened from its tree,
clinging to its twig 'till it grew shriveled and weak, Wind assailing the branches of its tree,
severing its stem from its twig, the leaf, now tumbling its way towards the frozen Lake's edge,
my eyes following its path as the gulls squawk above me, wrapping my scarf higher up past the tip of my nose,
that's stinging from the cold, fists of Wind pummeling my back as I clomp faster along the path,
the gulls making progress in their duel with Wind, their wings battered by this invisible foe
that whirls grains of snow dust up into Air, sculpts snow drifts and ripples in the Snow,
suspends the flight of the pair of gulls that have now broken free of Wind's grip on their wings,
no longer thrashing sideways through Air, flapping their way through the open space of Sky,
towards wherever they set out to fly this morning, to beat the storm, lead-bellied clouds hovering over the frozen Lake,
so low I could reach up and pluck them down from Sky, my eyes squinting up at the pair of gulls,
no longer flying sideways, but side by side, the open space of Sky between them, widening,
as their wings catch their second Wind, and the swollen clouds release streams of Snow,
that Wind snatches and whirls into a flurry, as I scurry along the path, watching for patches of ice hidden beneath the skin of Snow,
still not knowing what this year's resolution will be, since they never last longer than a week,
maybe, just to keep going, to breathe through the bluster and ride out the storm when it hurls me sideways,
like the gulls winging their way through the whirling Snow,
refusing to surrender to the wrath of an invisible foe.

Sylvie Kalenda

Nature in your backyard

County Life welcomes photo submissions depicting life in the Highlands. Email emily@ haliburtonpress.com. Please ensure images are high resolution - 200 dpi, 10 inches at its longest edge.

Blue jay by Jill Moulton

Curious squirrel by Vivien Mausz

Peek-a-boo pine marten by Tammy Nash

Trying to feed by Tammy Nash

Santa feeding a chickadee at the North Pole by Gord Kinzie

Pine marten on the watch by Tammy Nash

Snack time at the cottage on upper Glamor Lake by Gord Kinzie

Not intended to solicit properties or clients currently listed

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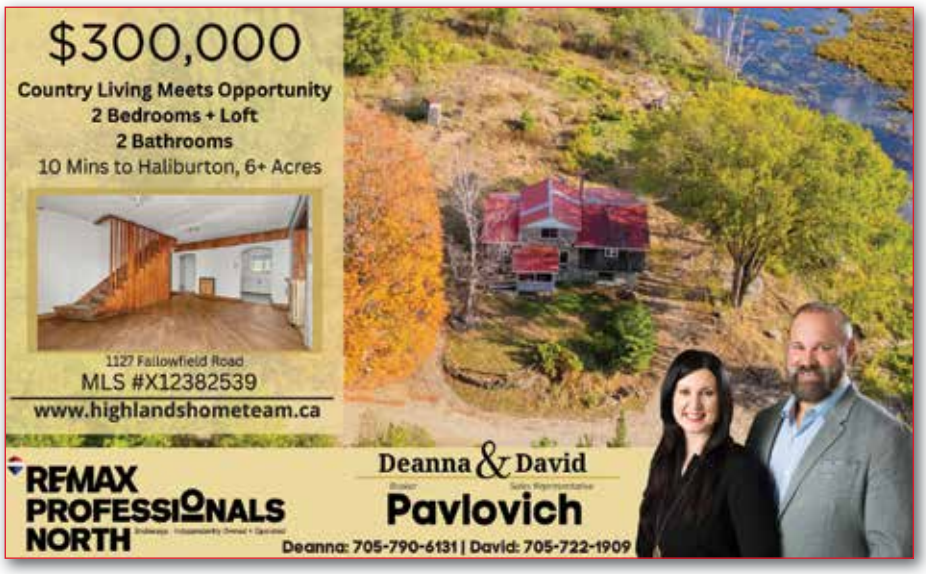

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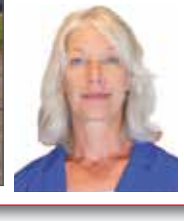

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Highlands Summer Festival seeks 2026 cast

EMILY STONEHOUSE
County Life Editor

A new year is a time to challenge yourself, to step outside your comfort zone, and to explore the possibilities of your talents.

What better time to dive into the world of local theatre. "It's a big season this year," said Highlands Summer Festival artistic producer Douglas Walker, "so there are a lot of roles we are looking to fill this year."

The local theatre lineup includes *Anne of Green Gables - the Musical*, *Doris and Ivy in the Home*, and *Too Many Cooks*. The established theatre company is heading into their 26th season, and historically captures a mixture of local performers and some from away. "Anyone and everyone is welcome," said Walker. "You don't need to have experience. Just a positive 'go get-em' outlook. A willingness to jump in and play."

Melissa Stephens, the executive producer of the festival, echoed Walker's comments. "Some of our best surprises are people who have not ever been on the stage before," she said, "or people who did it as teenagers and now have time to renew their passion for theatre."

With the stacked lineup, the producers are seeking a wide variety of participants in all age groups. In *Anne of Green Gables* alone, the casting requires a number of children, seniors, and everyone in between.

Walker and Stephens have prepared a detailed auditions package that is available online, via www.highlandssummerfestival.on.ca. While the full list of sought-after roles is listed through the package, Walker noted that they will be seeking others, as well. "We'll also be looking for an amazing ensemble to bring the energy for our musical," he shared.

The process to audition can be accessible for everyone. "It depends on what they are interested in auditioning for," said Walker. "If they'd like to be considered for the musical, we'll need to hear them sing and do a monologue or scene for us. If they are interested in auditioning for our plays only a monologue or scene will be required."

Walker suggested that while preparation will allow the producers to see what the actors are capable of, everyone is welcome to audition. "They can prepare a monologue or scene, a song if they'd like to be in the musical," he said. "But mostly I would just like people to be themselves and bring their personality to the audition. Also a willingness to jump in and go for it."

Auditions will be held for all three shows will be held on Saturday, Jan. 31, and Sunday, Feb. 1 at Haliburton United Church, located at 10 George Street. To arrange for an audition, contact Highlands Summer Festival board member Sylvia Perkins at sylvia.perkins55@gmail.com. Information about all auditions can be found via the Highlands Summer Festival website. If folks are unable to attend the in-person auditions, a video clip can be submitted.

Walker encourages all to come out to check out the process. "Come audition," he laughed. "Even if you've no idea what to expect. Theatre is awesome."

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A toast to Minden's newest restaurant

EMILY STONEHOUSE

County Life Editor

When you walk into Toast - Minden's newest restaurant - it feels like home. Cozy decor and cushy chairs, with the nostalgic smell of bacon and eggs wafting from the kitchen.

And that's exactly what owner Tara Schroeder was aiming for when she opened her doors. "We live in Minden," she said, "and we really wanted to bring something special to Minden."

Tara and her husband, Andrew Schroeder, have been married for 13 years, and have been in the food industry for the past seven. "We complement each other well in our skills," she laughed, noting that Andrew has a passion and dedication to the culinary arts, while she thrives in business management and front of house operations.

Many would recognize the Schroeders' faces from Mason Jar, a well-loved food truck that lives at the main intersection in Carnarvon. The couple just wrapped up their second summer at the fan-favourite destination; a project that overlapped with the purchase and opening of their brick and mortar restaurant in Minden.

"It all happened very quickly," shared Tara, noting that they took possession of their Minden site at the end of August, while the Mason Jar was running full tilt in Carnarvon. "It happened super fast."

Toast is located at 12311 Highway 35 in Minden; the former home of the Lounge Cafe and prior to that, the well-known 50s Diner.

While there are challenges in the industry, Tara and Andrew are well-versed in the highs and lows of restaurant management. "Staffing is an issue, for sure," said Tara. "Not for the front of house, but for the kitchen definitely. But we're just trying to bring something fresh to Minden, and really trying to create a safe space for people to be."

Tara and Andrew will continue operating both the Mason Jar and Toast simultaneously, and they are committed to creating the best possible experience for patrons at each location. "We care deeply about what we do," said Tara. "We care about each and every plate that goes out."

For the time being, Toast will be focusing on serving breakfast and lunch, with intentions of expanding to additional meals as they feel secure in their footing. "We will eventually branch out," Tara confirmed, "but we're starting slow."

The restaurant is open five days a week, from Thursday to Monday. On their first weekend in business in Minden, they entirely sold out of food due to the warm response and excitement from the community. "We've had such a positive response from the community," said Tara. "I just want it to feel like you're coming home."

Legion Events

Branch 441 Kinmount

Monday: Bid Euchre 1 p.m.
Tuesday: Closed
Wednesday: Mixed Darts, 7:30 p.m.
Thursday: Closed
Friday: Bingo- Doors open at 5 p.m., play at 6:45 p.m. Supper specials every Friday starting at 5 p.m. May purchase special and eat in club room downstairs. Clubroom opens at 4 p.m.
Saturday: Clubroom opens at 3 p.m. Meat draw 5:30 p.m.
Special events:
3rd Thursday of the month 7 p.m. executive meeting and 7:30 p.m. general meeting (members only)
3rd Sunday of the month Ladies Auxiliary Meeting (members only)
Hall rentals available at reasonable prices. Call 705-488-3462 or 705-928-7105. We welcome everyone to our events and we look forward to seeing you!

Branch 129 Haliburton

Mondays: Bridge 1 p.m. Schofield Rm. Youth darts 6:30 to 8 p.m. Clubroom 10 to 18 years of age. All are welcome, no experience necessary
Tuesdays: League darts 7 p.m.
Wednesdays: Bid Euchre 1 p.m. start – Main Hall. Bingo doors open at 6 p.m. Bingo 7 p.m. FirstWed of each month with jackpot. Follow Facebook.com/Branch129 Bingo for the most up-to-date information
Thursdays: General Meeting third Thursday of the month, 6:30 p.m. All members urged to attend. Ladies Auxiliary last Thursday of the month at 1 p.m.
Fridays: Five meat draw, five prizes each draw, first draw 4:30 p.m., last draw 6:30 p.m. Tickets $2 per draw. Paul Sisson, MC. Friday fun darts from 4:30 p.m. and onwards. 50/50 Draw 5:40 p.m.
Whether you're planning a function for 10 or 200, call Cheryl Waller at 905-447-7741, email haliburtonlegionrentals@gmail.com or visit haliburtonlegion.com. Everyone is welcome! Club room hours: Mon. 3 to 6 p.m., Tues. 3 to 9 p.m., Wed/Thurs. 3 to 6 p.m. Fri. 3 to 7 p.m.

Branch 636 Minden

Lunch - Monday to Friday
Monday: Rug Hookers every second week. Bid Euchre 1 to 3 p.m.
Tuesday: Food 5 p.m. Canoe FM Bingo 6 p.m.
Thursday: Cribbage 1 to 3 p.m., Darts 7 to 9 p.m. and Euchre 7 to 9 p.m.
Every other Friday: Karaoke 8 to 11 p.m.
Friday Fish & Chips, Wings. Lunch 11a.m. to 2 p.m. and Dinner 4 to 7 p.m.
Saturday All Day Breakfast 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. with three Meat draws at 11 a.m.
Call ahead any day for take-out: 705-286-4541.
Schedules are subject to change without notice.
Check our Facebook page Minden Legion Branch 636 for more info.

Branch 624 Wilberforce

Hours - Sunday: Special Events Only, Monday: 7 to 10 p.m., Tuesday: Closed, Wednesday: 2 to 10 p.m., Thursday: 2 to 6 p.m., Friday: 2 to 11 p.m., Saturday: 2 to 9 p.m.
Mondays: Jan. 19, 26 Darts $5/player 7 p.m.
Tuesdays: Jan. 20, 27 Veteran's and Seniors Exercise Club. Starts at 1:30 p.m.
Wednesdays: Jan. 14, 21, 28 Darts $5/player 2 p.m.
Jan. 14, 21, 28 Quick Supper Menu changes weekly $10. 5 to 6:30 p.m.
7, 14, 21, 28 Open Cribbage 6:30 p.m. – No need to pre-register
Thursdays: Jan. 22 HHHS Social Rec 10 a.m.
Fridays: Jan. 16, 30 Fish and Chips 1pc/$15, 2pc/$20. 5 to 8 p.m.
Jan. 23 Community Care 55+ Lunch $17. noon
Wings and Jam Session $15/lb. 5 to 8 p.m.
Saturday:
Jan. 17, 24, 31 Meat Draw 3 p.m.
Jan. 24 Pat and Phyllis Gallen Lake Trout Ice Fishing Derby. Weigh in 3 p.m.
Jan. 24 Karaoke 8 p.m.
Jan. 31 Nacho Average Trivia 7 p.m. $5/Player
Call the Legion for more info 705-448-222

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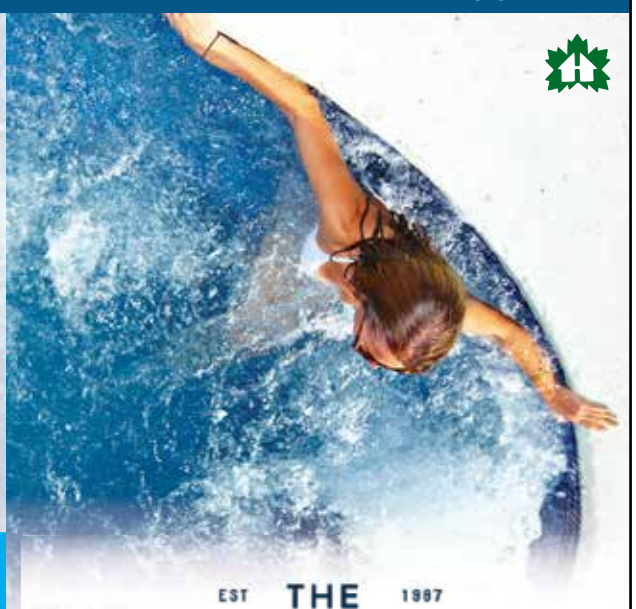

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Community Events

Send your event listing to classifieds@haliburtonpress.com

Documentary Screening of Sovereign Soil
When: Thursday, Jan. 15 at 1 p.m.
Where: Minden Hills Library
Join us to see an exploration of northern life, food sovereignty, and the deep relationship between people and the land. No registration required. The film is provided courtesy of the National Film Board in collaboration with Minden Hills Cultural Centre.

SALC Needle Felting Winter Landscapes
When: Thursday, Jan. 15 from 2 to 3 p.m.
Where: Dysart Library in Haliburton Village
In this free, hands-on workshop, you'll learn how to needle-felt a winter landscape—snowy hills, evergreen trees, and starry skies. All materials provided. Offered in partnership with the Government of Ontario, supporting social connection, creativity, and well-being among older adults in our community. Registration required. Call 705-457-2241 or email programs@haliburtonlibrary.ca to register.

Tech Help Walk-in-Clinic
When: Friday, Jan.16 from 1 to 4 p.m.
Where: Minden Hills Library
Stuck on a tech problem? First come, first served. Each person gets a 30-minute session with library staff to tackle one specific technology challenge. One session per person per day.

How to Care for Houseplants Workshop
When: Saturday, Jan. 17 from 2 to 3 p.m.
Where: Dysart Library in Haliburton Village
A plant expert will guide you through the basics of indoor plant care – including watering, lighting, repotting, soil types, common pests, and easy troubleshooting tips. Registration required. Call 705-457-2241 or email programs@haliburtonlibrary.ca to register.

Knitting Circle
When: Tuesday, Jan. 20 from 1 to 3 p.m.
Where: Wilberforce Library
Drop in for a cozy afternoon of stitching, chatting, and community. All ages and skill levels are welcome (knitters and crocheters alike).

SALC Needle Felting Winter Landscapes
When: Wednesday, Jan. 21 from 2 to 3 p.m.
Where: Minden Hills Library
In this free, hands-on workshop, you'll learn how to needle-felt a winter landscape. All materials provided. Offered in partnership with the Government of Ontario, supporting social connection, creativity, and well-being among older adults in our community. Registration required. Call 705-457-2241 or email programs@haliburtonlibrary.ca to register.

Tech Help Walk-in-Clinic
When: Wednesday, Jan. 21 from 12:30 to 2:30 p.m.
Where: Stanhope Library
Stuck on a tech problem? First come, first served. Each person gets a 30-minute session with library staff to tackle one specific technology challenge. One session per person per day.

Savouring Stories
When: Thursday, January 22 from 11 a.m. to noon
Where: Highland Grove Library
Each month, we explore the fascinating world of food through stories, history, shared experiences, and cooking (every second month). No registration required.

Recurring events

Friends of the Haliburton County Public Library New Book Nook Hours
When: 1st and 3rd Tuesday of the month - 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.
Where: Minden Hills Branch, 176 Bobcaygeon Rd. Minden
Choose from a variety of gently read books: thrillers, mysteries, romance, biographies, children and youth selections, Canadian authors, fiction, science fiction/fantasy, sports, spiritual and other non-fiction books. Bring a reusable bag. Payment is by cash donation. All money raised supports library enhancements and programmes for all libraries in the county.

Wilberforce Visitor Information Centre
When: Thursday to Monday 10 a.m. 4 p.m. (Closed Tuesday and Wednesday)
Where: 2786 Essonville Line in Wilberforce, at the Curling Club
We offer mineral permission to collect forms, directions, geocaching information and GPS rentals, trails, events, and other general area information. Free Wi-Fi is also available.

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Mineral collecting is a fun outdoor activity. Adults and kids alike will delight in the chance to dig for buried treasure and bring home some colourful gems of your very own! Get a Permission to Collect form (free) from our website highlandseast.ca.

Geocaching
Geocaching is a family friendly outdoor game. It's often referred to as "treasure hunting with a high tech twist" because you use the geocaching.com website and either a GPS device or a smartphone. GPS Rentals are available from the Visitor Information Centre and come preloaded so you can start playing right away.

Trails
Whether you like to walk or run, ride a bike, horse or an ATV, one of Highlands East's trails is sure to please. Come enjoy the fall colours. Maps and descriptions can be found on our website highlandseast.ca.

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Crash hurts couple

Community reaches out to help young Minden parents

by PETER DOWNS
Staff Reporter

The community is reaching out to help a young Minden couple who were badly hurt in a head-on car crash last week.

Darren and Tracy Cole, the parents of two girls, are receiving treatment for many serious injuries in separate Toronto hospitals after an accident Tuesday evening outside Minden.

Cathy and Vince Lancia, close family friends of the Coles, have set up a trust fund for the couple at the CIBC banks in Haliburton and Minden.

Doctors say Darren, 27, who sustained the most serious injuries, won't be able to stand up, let alone work, for about a year. Tracy, 25, is being moved to a rehabilitation centre next week for her leg injury, but also won't be able to work for quite a while.

Fortunately for the Coles, their daughters, Brandy, 8, and Bailey, 4, were not with them in their truck when the crash happened.

Aside from their physical injuries, the accident will also take a heavy toll on the couple's finances, said Cathy Lancia.

Because Darren was self employed through a carpentry company he recently started, he won't be able to qualify for unemployment benefits.

Tracy, who previously worked at Wee Care, has been participating in a retraining program where she was practising to be a hairdresser.

See HUSBAND page 2

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Winter's back and so's the fun!

We got a blanket of snow on the weekend that improved cross-country and snowmobile trail conditions after freezing rain and mild weather earlier in the week. Among the skiers enjoying the great outdoors at Moose Woods Trail Centre, near Haliburton, were the Eagle Lake family of Lorelyn Morgan, Maradyn Wood, Barrie Wood and Cavell Wood.

'Miles and miles of destruction'

Local Hydro crews help clean up after ice storm in Eastern Ontario

by MARTHA PERKINS
Editor

Even the tornadoes which have ripped through the Haliburton Highlands could not prepare local hydro crews for the devastation which greeted them last week in Eastern Ontario.

When a tornado hits the Highlands, the swath of downed poles and trees is restricted to a relatively small area, but after last week's ice storm left a two-inch coating of ice on buildings, poles, and trees "it's just miles and miles and miles of destruction," says Jim Burk, a forestry technician with the Minden Ontario Hydro base who's talked to some of the 19 men from the area who've gone to the Kingston area to help.

"It's inconceivable. It's incredible to try to even imagine it... I've heard they just get one thing fixed and it falls back down again. One lineman climbed a pole and 12 span fell down because of his weight, so they had an order not to climb any more. It's very dangerous because stuff is falling down all around them."

Just getting to the downed poles is dangerous. It took the crews and trucks almost six hours to get to Arnprior, a trip that usually takes four. It was hard to keep the trucks on the ice-covered roads.

"(Forestry technician Rusty Cochrane) said that to get to where they were going they had to detour for miles" because roads were blocked with debris, Burk says.

He also heard that not one house has a television antenna

See HYDRO page 4

Poor conditions postpone Sled Dog Derby

After carefully scrutinizing the trail, the Minden Sled Dog Derby committee has decided to postpone this year's race to the snow dates, January 31 and February 1.

The inspection tour on Monday morning revealed that the heavy rains of last week had created open water on may areas of the trail that would make trail construction impossible, even with the past weekend's snow. The popular races, which attract some of the continent's best mushers, were supposed to be this weekend.

"This decision is not taken lightly," Race Governor Val Lougheed says. "Our first concern is for the safety of the dogs. We wouldn't put our own dogs at risk and we won't ask others to do it either."

Both Val and Steve Lougheed and their two sons, Jesse and Caleb, are mushers.

She also noted that the event has become the leading sprint class in the world, a reputation that she did not wish to put in jeopardy by having an unsafe or inadequate trail.

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